DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 434 CS 512 132

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TITLE	Name Talk: Exploring Letter-Sound Knowledge in the Primary Classroom.
INSTITUTION	MarcoPolo Education Foundation.; National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL.; International Reading Association, Newark, DE.
PUB DATE	2002-11-13
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Managing Editor, ReadWriteThink, International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., P.O. Box 8139, Newark, DE 19714-8139. E-mail: comments@readwritethink.org. For full text: http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Objectives; Evaluation Methods; Lesson Plans; *Letters (Alphabet); *Phoneme Grapheme Correspondence; Primary Education; *Reading Instruction; *Student Motivation

ABSTRACT

This lesson plan invites primary students to share their letter/sound knowledge in a small group and gives teachers an opportunity to assess knowledge in a meaningful context. Working with name cards, students share observations about their names and the names of their classmates. Extensions are appropriate for a range of primary-aged students. During two 15-minute sessions, students will: share their knowledge of letter and sounds, prompted by their names; make connections between their names/knowledge and that of their peers; make connections between personal print knowledge and the available print in the classroom setting; and demonstrate knowledge of letters "in context." The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. (PM)

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Name Talk: Exploring Letter-Sound Knowledge in the Primary Classroom

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Grade Band

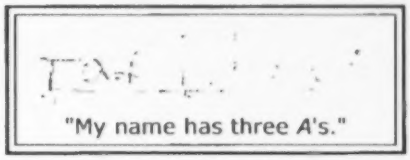
K-2

Estimated Lesson Time

Two 10-15 minutes sessions

Overview

This lesson invites pre-school through first grade students to share what they know about letters and sounds with a small group of their peers, as well as gives teachers an opportunity to assess that knowledge in a more meaningful context than traditional "screening" sessions achieve. Working with name cards written by themselves or an adult, students share observations about their names and the names of their classmates. Extensions of the lesson are appropriate for more experienced and knowledgeable primary-aged students.



"My name has three *A*'s."

From Theory to Practice

The *Primary Voices K-6* article "Letting Go of 'Letter of the Week'" shows the power of using children's names in early literacy lessons. The article outlines these concepts:

- Young children develop literacy knowledge from an early age, even though it is not yet conventional.
- Much of young children's letter-sound knowledge begins with personal connections to their own names, family members' names, and environmental print.
- New learning develops by connecting familiar information to new information.

Student Objectives

Students will

- share their knowledge of letter and sounds, prompted by their names.
- make connections between their names/knowledge and that of their peers.
- make connections between personal print knowledge and the available print in the classroom setting.
- demonstrate knowledge of letters "in context."

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Resources

- Babynamer Web Site
- Behind the Name Web Site
- Heraldry on the Internet Web Site
- U.S. Surname Distribution Web Site
- Name St. USA Web Site
- Stapleless Book Student Interactive
- Social Security Administration Web Site

Instructional Plan

Resources

- Name cards or blank notecards and pens.
- Anecdotal note paper/post-its or a letter-sound screening sheet on which to take notes.
- Kevin Henke's picture book, *Chrysanthemum* (1996).
- A one-sheet class list written in large font or print. Find a logical ways to group the student names—i.e. seating groups or teams—so that the list can be more easily read.
- Stapleless Book Student Interactive

Preparation

1. Organize students into small, heterogeneous groups of 4-6, i.e. by seating groups, seasonal birthdays, or friendship groups. Organizing by "ability" is less advantageous for this lesson, as the diversity of responses from a range of students is an asset to the conversation.
2. Create name cards for the students, as well as one for yourself, if the children's writing is not yet conventional. (It is worthwhile to try this lesson with student-written cards and teacher-written cards to explore the relative values of each, rather than making firm assumptions about the students' abilities.)
3. If you elect to have children write their own names, have a stack of notecards and marking pens available. Cutting 9"x12" card stock in three strips works well, or 3"x9."
4. Review use of the Stapleless Book Student Interactive.

Instruction and Activities

NOTE: With more experienced/older students, the lesson could begin with Session Two.

Session One

1. Read *Chrysanthemum* aloud to the class, the story of a young mouse whose name is the focus of much notice and teasing. Her teacher and parents successfully help her recognize that Chrysanthemum is a special name. Following the reading of the book, tell kids they'll be invited to participate in "name talk" groups about their own names. As the class looks at the book title, or the word Chrysanthemum written on the board, ask what they can see in her name. You might expect answers like ... her name starts like Chris's name ... there are two /m/'s in her name ... her name has a big C at the beginning.
2. Invite students to come to a meeting table to talk about their names. Create or pass out name cards. Accept not-yet-conventional writing and spelling if kids do the writing. Their friends will often help them out, necessitating they turn the card over or use a second card.
3. Begin the discussion with "Who would like to share first? Tell us anything you notice about your name." Wait for a child to take the lead. First responses have included, "My names has three triangles (capital A's)." "My first name has two 'n"s and my last name has one 'n'." "My name starts the same as Andrew's." Or, "My name starts with a big letter." Children readily take up this "name talk," allowing plenty of opportunity for anecdotal notetaking.

Facilitate turn-taking as needed.

4. Contribute to the talk with an interesting comment about your own name. I have contributed comments like, "My name has a "y" at the end but it makes the /e/ sound (Kathy). My last name starts with an "e," and it makes the schwa sound (Egawa).
5. After each child has made four or five contributions, compliment the students on how much they know and invite them to continue noticing new things about their names and those of their friends and family.
6. Make the Stapleless Book Student Interactive available on a nearby computer. Title page one with the "name" of the group as appropriate (the Whale Clan, Kindergarten Buddies, etc.), and then invite each child to enter his or her name on one page of the book. Print as many copies of the book as there are members of the group, pass out, and fold together. Invite the students to draw or write something about each of their classmates on the page with that person's name.

Homework Follow-up

- Invite families to learn more about the popularity of their names (the site includes names rising in popularity, those being used less often, most frequent boys' and girls' names by year and state, ad so forth) or the Social Security Administration maintained Web site of the ten most popular baby names for every year since 1880.

- Invite the students and their families to create another version of the stapleless book. Variations could include adding one family member's name to each page (don't forget pets and grandparents!), or running off or making a blank copy of the book to carry family so each person can write his or her name on a page. Encourage more variations!

Session Two

1. Keep the same groups or create new ones. Gather the small group together at a meeting table and pass out the class name sheets. This time invite the students to read the names, noticing how the names are alike and different. This initial name "reading" will likely take 2-3 minutes.
2. Again invite students to share their observations. Responses have included comments like, "Everyone has an "e" in their name except Ryan." "My dad's name is Bob, too." "I spell my name different than the other Claire because mine is spelled the Irish way—Clare."

Homework Follow-up

- Create a one-page sheet divided into 24-28 box spaces (fold, then trace on fold lines) and print one child's name at the bottom of each box. Send the sheets home with the instructions to draw or write one thing about each classmate right above his or her name. Parents can help with writing as needed.

Variations or Extensions

- Match a small school photo next to each name for young children. Some school picture companies even provide a small set of photos with adhesive backs.

- Invite students to write their immediate family names on cards. This task could be homework to prepare for "name talk" the following day. Pet or teddy bear names could also work.

- Add addresses or other ID along to the name cards. (Take caution with privacy issues.)

- Use this engagement in partnership with a class of older "buddies, working with two pairs in a group.

- Follow with multiple opportunities for letter "play": magnetic alphabet letters, computer games, assorted writing paper and writing instruments—the more interesting the better.

- Research and collect multiple spellings of the same name, in particular noting cultural or linguistic root variations.
- Research the Spanish, Chinese or Russian variation of each child's name in the class. Use those names.
- Invite parents to write a letter to the class about the choice of the child's name (an idea developed by Shelley Harwayne at the Manhattan New School in New York City; letters were placed in a notebook and made available for other families to read on a table in the main hall).
- Focus on nicknames. Little kids might like to hear *Ira Sleeps Over*, noting the nickname of Ira's teddy bear. Older kids might want to know that Grover Cleveland had 20 nicknames, more than any other president. They included Dump Prophet, Buffalo Hangman, Grover the Good, Old Veto, and Perpetual Candidate.

Web Resources
Web resources are included for adult research related to the lesson.

Babynamer
http://babynamer.com/
Invite families to learn more about the popularity of their names. The site includes names rising in popularity, those being used less, most frequent boys' and girls' names by year and state, etc.

Name St. USA
http://www.namestusa.com/searcher.asp
Search for name derivations. Requires a fee to access printable name attributes.

Behind The Name
http://www.behindthename.com/
Resource for first name derivations and name variations by country.

U.S. Surname Distribution
http://www.hamrick.com/names/index.html
Search for surname distribution in the United States based on census data of the 50,000 most common surnames.

Heraldry on the Internet
http://digiserve.com/heraldry/surnames.htm
Surname information by country of origin.

Social Security Administration
http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/index.html
Social Security Administration maintained website of the ten most popular baby names for every year since 1880.

Student Assessment/Reflections

Anecdotal notes—these are particularly helpful for students who appear to have little letter-sound knowledge on traditional screening or testing instruments. Notes might be taken on an alphabetic knowledge screening instrument for individual children.

NCTE/IRA Standards

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

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read·write·think

International Reading Association NCTE marcopolo

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